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ABSTRACT

Some steps toward the integration of media and visual literacy across the curriculum of secondary school classrooms are described, focusing on a project in Pennsylvania that uses collaborative processes to involve educators at secondary and higher levels in the design, development, and implementation of a statewide integrated framework for visual arts and media education. A field study of current practices in the use of critical media education in classrooms that involves 30 elementary and secondary school teachers indicates that few classrooms teach analysis or interpretation of media, with teachers in only 2 out of 10 schools having any critical media education in their classrooms. Most teachers use media tools merely to illustrate instruction. The baseline information gathered to date indicates the timeliness and need for such a project. A media literacy course for preservice teachers at Pennsylvania State University has been implemented with the aim of ensuring teacher competence in the analysis and interpretation of media. Appendix lists outcome based media education goals as defined in the February 1993 issue of "Pennsylvania Education." (Contains 7 references.) (SLD)

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Integrating Visual Literacy Across the Curriculum

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Integrating Visual Literacy Across the Curriculum

Ladislaus M. Semali

Introduction

Over the past quarter century, communication technologies have spawned an explosion of possible ways in which "text" is part of the out-of-class curriculum, both written and electronic, from photographs to film to videotext. Attempts to integrate these "texts" across the curriculum in learning environments remain problematic.

This paper will explore some specific steps being taken to achieve integration of media and visual literacy across the curriculum of secondary school classrooms. Integration as such is not a novel concept, but integrating visual literacy across the curriculum is new to many schools in the United States. In short, visual literacy is the ability to read, interpret and understand how meaning is made and derived from photographs and other electronic visuals. In practice it consists of understanding connotative messages embedded in the text of the visual as well as interaction of pictures to words, the context of the viewer, and relayed messages obtained from the maker of the image.

Integrating visual literacy across the curriculum is an important project. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as well as elsewhere in the nation, there is broad support for integrated curricula. The integration of skills and content has been the central concept of the essentials of education advocated and backed by nationwide organizations that include the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council for Social Studies, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the National Education Association.

These organizations of educators have for the past decade advised teachers and other educators that processes and abilities do not grow in isolation from content. They insist that students acquire these processes and abilities through observing, listening, reading, talking and writing about science, mathematics, history and the social sciences, the arts and other aspects of our intellectual, social, and

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cultural heritage. Their prevailing rationale is inspired by the belief that the separation of school from the "real world" only increases when the arts and media remain marginalized or extracurricular. Likewise efforts to increase literacy learning are rendered incomplete and irrelevant when they fail to acknowledge the meaning-making capabilities of art and visual media literacy.

As we approach the twenty-first century, schools cannot afford to dismiss or ignore art encoded in visual media and other mass media. Unquestionably, these forms constitute the newest currency of cultural literacy in our pluralistic society. In short, a vibrant, vital, and inclusive literacy has emerged outside the walls of the school, while the narrow view of literacy valued within the school remains, for many, inaccessible, irrelevant, and alienating.

Research Project-Overview

"Integrating Visual Arts across the Curriculum" is part of a broader research project in progress, designed in collaboration with the Pennsylvania State Department of Education to develop and implement critical experiences in visual arts and media education in the existing *Pennsylvania Framework of Reading, Writing and Talking across the Curriculum* (Lytle & Botel, 1990). This project initiates innovative collaborative processes that involve classroom teachers, educational specialists, administrators, university faculty, arts and media experts and students in reflecting on theory and practice in order to design, develop and implement a statewide integrated curricular framework of the visual arts and media education.

This project stems from statewide efforts to develop and promote integrated curricula to fit current educational needs. In fact, "Integrating Arts and Visual Literacy" enhances and complements the current *Pennsylvania Framework for Reading, Writing, and Talking Across the Curriculum,* and brings this statewide framework up to date to reflect Outcome Based Education (OBE) goals under consideration by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education (*Pennsylvania Education*, March 1993). These OBE goals are statements defining knowledge and skills required for graduation from public schools in Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Framework for Reading, Writing, and Talking Across the Curriculum, provides a resource for educators throughout the Commonwealth to be used by any teacher, of any subject, at any grade level, or by a group of teachers or a group of school leaders and teachers to reflect upon, design or redesign their curricula and instructional practices.

In keeping with these OBE goals for communication, the present research project recognizes the need to expand the integrative model envisaged in the Pennsylvania Framework to ensure that all students, kindergarten through grade 12, acquire the ability to understand how visual media and particularly visuals represented in the mass media work to produce meanings. Given the time investment in these media experiences by school-age students, it is indeed the case that we are skilled participants in a variety of media events. Yet there is a question as to whether we possess a

critical media knowledge. In other words, as long as our arts and media literacies remain "unschooled," do we remain media "illiterates?" A commentary in the National council of Teachers of English publication, *The English Journal* (Nelms, 1992), posited,

> Youngsters study reading and literature for twelve years and still graduate naive about the techniques and devices used to capture their attention and imagination, about the cultural codes that reflect and shape their thinking, in their own native literature - the electronic literature to which they have given their allegiance (p. 13).

Should schools integrate visual arts and media as legitimate curricular sites? If so, where might they fit within school curricula so that they are not separate "subjects," but "critical" languages and literacies, shared by educated persons? These are the questions and issues that we must confront if schooling is to be relevant to students' lived lives.

Aims of the Study

This study aims to produce, in conjunction with educators across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, an integrative curricular framework of visual arts and other mass media. It consists of a series of collaborative processes that involve teachers, educational specialists, administrators, university faculty, arts and media specialists and students in reflecting on theory and practice in order to design, develop and implement a statewide integrated curricular framework of the arts and media education. The goal is to use multi-stage processes to obtain baseline data on descriptions of beliefs about integrating visual arts and media in the curriculum, inventory of learning experiences and existing lessons, media instructional materials, media artifacts, student media productions and media hardware.

The overall assumption underlying this study is that all students, kindergarten through grade 12, can acquire without additional courses in the classroom the ability to understand how visual media and the mass media work and produce meanings, how they are organized and how to use them. In short, the outcomes of this project aim to produce a resource curricular framework that strives to develop a literate person who is able to read, write, listen, talk, analyze, evaluate and produce communications in a variety of media inclusive of print, television, music, video, film, radio, compact disk, hypertext for personal computers, and the arts.

This work affirms that learning involves complex intellectual knowledge and skills that enhance the ability of individuals to continue to educate themselves throughout their social life. An indispensable component of such lifelong learning consists of actively questioning the social, political, and cultural structures and media artifacts that comprise the fabric of everyday life (Schwoch, White & Reilly, 1992). Engaging visual arts and media culture is of vital importance because these are

major curricular sites of everyday student learning.

Making Schools Relevant to Life: Integrated Pedagogy

The mass media have been educational sites for a long time now, and their existence shows that the era of the omnipotent teacher with his "ex-cathedra" pronouncements has come to an end. Given this awareness, plus the availability of other new services designed to facilitate the running of schools and the changes that have occurred in the whole infrastructure of schools, it makes us realize that the universal backwardness of school practice is paradoxical.

The main criticism levelled against schools nowadays is that conditions inside are not in harmony with conditions outside. To improve this situation, attention must be paid to three important areas (a) adaptation for pedagogical purposes of the way in which abstract knowledge is acquired (in school and outside school); (b) development of critical and up-to-date principles and methods of illustration; and (3) better practical use than hitherto of critical thinking skills.

One of the more successful strategies used to counteract this charge is to take seriously student-centered teaching strategies. George Gerbner suggests that media study is in fact "tantamount to re-instituting liberal education, for it liberates the individual from an unquestioning dependence on the classics, and the achievements of humankind (Gerbner, 1972). Through media study for instance, students broaden the meaning of the word "culture" to include the entire social environment. In Canada, Britain and Australia where media literacy has been taught since the 1980s, students use cultural analysis to find connections in the entire social environment. For example, they have learned to use their critical thinking skills to deconstruct packaged media messages like television commercials, or political campaign messages to insure an informed citizenry.

Len Masterman (1983) believes media education is about empowerment and strengthening society's democratic structure. Central to media education is helping students understand that media mediate, which means the media do much more than merely record reality and reflect it. Media including film, television, advertising, and the news -- create representations of reality. Although the images and the stories may seem real, or "true to life," they are always structured to represent a particular point of view, perspective, ideology, or value system.

If we are to provide students with communication skills for today and tomorrow we must help them to comprehend and communicate through both traditional and emerging technologies of communication. Making these changes requires that teachers are trained in the emerging literacies and that principals, superintendents, and administrators value and respect the relationship between the literacies.

Unfortunately, the "cultural inquiry model" being suggested here and other student-centered teaching strategies like it, demand a teaching

paradigm very different from those practiced in many American schools today. The current pedagogical styles in schools today are pragmatic, and skill-based, relying on rote learning and lecture. The public is unfriendly to the idea of student-centered learning because educators, parents and politicians alike are more comfortable returning to older ways of "return to the basics" which often means more lectures, and "test-taking".

In Pennsylvania, for example, the legislature, after a lengthy and cumbersome debate, has recently introduced "student learning outcomes education" partly as an attempt to steer the curriculum away from this pragmatic model of teaching. Even then, the implementation of an outcome-based curriculum will not be without significant disagreements.

Method and Sample

The process to develop and implement critical experiences in visual arts and media education in the existing ***Pennsylvania Framework of Reading, Writing and Talking across the Curriculum*** is informed by a field study (in progress) of ten selected schools teaching about media in Pennsylvania. The objective of the field study is to collect data through qualitative methods about current practice in the use of critical media education in classrooms.

A total of 30 teachers were interviewed and polled with a questionnaire to obtain their reflections on the use of visual arts and other media in elementary and secondary schools. Using a protocol developed with an open ended inquiry, interviews with these teachers focused on (1) what problems and concerns does the teacher encounter? (2) what kinds of support does the teacher find valuable? (3) how does the teacher's understanding of the process of children learning to read, write, listen, and talk across the curriculum change as a result of efforts to integrate arts and media?

Overall, the method used in the ten schools was focused to examine existing innovative collaborative processes that involve classroom teachers in reflecting on theory and practice. Interactions between the teacher and students as they each act upon the learning environment provided the laboratory for these media innovations. The goal was be to develop and implement a statewide integrated curricular framework of the visual arts and media education.

Research in Progress Outcomes

The preliminary results show that few classrooms teach about media. Out of the 10 schools visited, only teachers in two schools had a semblance of critical media education in their classes. Some schools in this sample had very elaborate equipment including satellite dishes, closed-circuit television, electronic mail connections and lots of video cassette recorders and film projectors. One school had fully-fledged production equipment. However, most teachers used media tools, namely as audio-visuals to illustrate instruction. Understanding the language of visual media was scanty. No attempt was made to explore how visual representations in curriculum materials

privileged some ways of knowing over others and how the terms of such privilege related to the school's role in society. Teachers were not aware of their important role or responsibility and need to commit to constructing classroom practices that counter the ways in which sexism, elitism, racism and other oppressive formations structure classroom interactions.

The reasons given for this state of affairs were: (a) lack of media education training; (b) lack of reward system on the part of the administration for innovative and creative teachers that want to teach visual literacy in their classrooms; (c) lack of time; and (d) no attempt or encouragement for a global approach to integrating knowledge.

These findings are important. These preliminary results raise the question whether over and above the traditional teaching methods and strategies, teachers are expressly equipped with an educational methodology specifically designed for visual arts and the mass media. This question is increasingly pertinent in so far as hitherto the main emphasis in schools has been on the instructional aspect. As noted by Davis (1992), media use in the classroom is often limited to teaching ***with*** media rather than ***about*** media. Videotapes, for example, are often used in a way very analogous to textbooks: students are shown a videotape, then expected to regurgitate its content in a quiz or test. There is little exploration of how the videotape or the video format itself might color the content. Fortunately, the more frequent use of video in the classroom means that many U.S. teachers are now comfortable teaching ***with*** media, but teaching ***about*** media -- as media educators do in other countries -- is still rare.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to obtain baseline data to guide the development of an integrative curricular framework of visual arts and other media. As we embark on this process of developing a framework, three tasks emerge: (1) design curricula that integrate arts and media literacies; (2) develop school sites in which the designed curricula can take place; and (3) further implement programs through the dissemination of research findings and the creation of networking operations under the auspices of the State Department of Education and the Pennsylvania State University.

The lessons we have learned thus far point to the need and timeliness of this project. There is urgency to introduce a critical pedagogy in teacher preparation colleges and classrooms. Educators and administrators need to become aware of media education in general, and must address the relationship between visual representation and the construction of knowledge in education media in particular. The myth that the accepted conventions of film, video, and photographic representation are mere neutral carriers devoid of content implications no longer hold ground.

The training of teachers should include integrated materials providing an education in mass information ranging from the pre-school to the university

and even to the adult-education age. During these courses, teacher-trainees would acquire the knowledge and competencies that would enable them to teach their students, or at least familiarize them with, the process of evaluating knowledge obtained through the visual arts and mass media. The process would also include critically systematizing this knowledge and integrating it into the knowledge obtained at school. As facilitators, teachers would help students take an exploratory stance to probe their relationship with media. This encourages students to raise issues and questions in response to media texts, including the textbook.

In an attempt to design curricula that integrate arts and media literacies, I have initiated a media literacy course at the Pennsylvania State University for preservice teachers. Offered every semester, this course aims to insure that teachers achieve the competencies to: (1) recognize, read, comprehend and question ideas and information whether conveyed through print or picture; (2) critically analyze, and evaluate media messages for simplification, distortion, bias, and propaganda, and the competency to teach these skills to elementary and secondary school students; (3) manifest insights into multicultural education -- the knowledge to analyze both the content and origin of media messages, focusing attention not just on what groups are represented and how, but also on why those patterns of production exist, and (4) demonstrate their ability to enhance visual learning and the value of imagery in instruction. For history and social studies teachers, media literacy offers a dynamic way to explore the construction of history and social representations in everything from picture books to advertising, television, and film. For example, teachers who attempt to understand stereotyping, bias, and prejudice in the media or in the curriculum must focus on the issue of ownership.

Since our focus is on language and literacy education, we apply the **narrative analysis method** to study visual representations. In the analysis of visuals used for advertising in various print media or textbook illustrations, students strive to uncover some of the narrative meaning by: (1) questioning the order of events depicted; (2) the actual history of visual production, circulation and consumption; (3) who produced the visual; (4) under what circumstances and (5) for what possible reasons.

My experience in using the narrative analysis method with students shows that these questions can help them discover other possible meanings within the photograph.

Students learned by analyzing textbook photographs that publishers have a great deal to do with some of the photographs selected. The myth that photographs in textbooks may serve only to break up a long text is no longer true. Because of the great expense involved, new photographs are not usually taken specifically for texts. Instead, publishers hire photo researchers to find appropriate photographs, thus drawing on already existing collections. The result is that the choice of photographs depends on what is already available, and what is available depends on what has been requested by authors in the past. This trend tends to perpetuate

special interests, stereotypes, and biases in visual representation today.

The lessons learned by my students in the narrative analysis method illustrate that photographic representations are not always neutral or devoid of contentious implications, but that they actually reflect and shape content and power relations.

In summary, the design of the curricula, the school sites, and the lessons derived from field study and experimental classrooms, will accomplish the objectives as we move toward an integrative curricular framework of visual literacy across the curriculum.

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APPENDIX

Student Learning Outcomes
(Pennsylvania Education)
Outcome Based Education Goals

Communications

The outcomes (marked with a star) describe a literate person who is able to read, write, listen, talk, analyze, evaluate and produce communications in a variety of media inclusive of print and other media in our culture and the ability to deconstruct packaged media products to insure an informed citizenry.

(1) All students will use effective research and information management skills, including primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.

(2)* All students will read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

(3)* All students will respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to

make decisions and solve problems.

(4)* All students will write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.

(5)* All students will analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, as well as separating fact from opinion, distinguishing propaganda from the truth, recognizing stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.

(6) All students will exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions. They will ask and answer questions appropriately and promote effective group communications.

(7) All students will listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.

(8) All students will compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.

(9) All students will converse, at minimum level of "intermediate low," as defined in the oral proficiency guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, in at least one language other than English, including the native language if other than English.